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ABSTRACT

Information about how Arcola citizens felt about their public education system was obtained through phone interviews with 271 adults. Arcola was chosen because its small population (2,600 residents), its concern for the quality of education, and its economic base (farming) made it typical of a rural community in central and southern Illinois. Phone data indicated that the residents had six major concerns: school discipline; curriculum, especially career education and the teaching of basic subjects; communication among school administrators and the community; the Teacher Association's effect on the quality of education; finances; and how the school system could better serve the community. Two public forums were held to discuss these six concerns and any others which arose at the meetings. At both forums, three panelists representing the School Board, the Citizens' Advisory Committee and the Teachers' Association reacted to the data gathered. Audiences completed evaluation questionnaires following each forum. Findings included: 67% believed the quality of their public education was good or very good; 59% felt the School Board effectively represented the community's interests and viewpoints; 78% felt stricter discipline should be enforced in the schools; 84% agreed more time should be spent in teaching the basic skills; 31% felt that using a property tax to fund public education was unfair; 14% felt that effectiveness would be improved if more community input was incorporated in Board decisions. (NQ)

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CITIZEN ATTITUDES TOWARD PUBLIC EDUCATION
in
ARCOLA, ILLINOIS

This report has been prepared for the citizens of Arcola, Illinois by the Office of Continuing Education and Public Service and the College of Education, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.*

The report describes: 1) the processes used in gathering data regarding citizen attitudes toward public education; 2) the findings of the data collection; and 3) the development of public forums to discuss the findings. Also included is a section on recommendations.

The materials for this report were gathered with the cooperation of Arcola residents whose helpful comments and criticism provided the direction for this undertaking.

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SUMMARY STATEMENT

Small communities throughout the United States are facing a myriad of problems with elementary and secondary public school education ranging from questions of who should control the schools to rising school costs. How communities examine these problems and what part institutions of higher education can play in that process of examination have concerned faculty and staff from the Office of Continuing Education and Public Service and the College of Education, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Of particular interest to staff from the University of Illinois is how a community can gather information about its public education system so that community members can see and discuss that information. The process of gathering, discussing, and interpreting information through the mutual efforts of the community working with the University is what comprises the Arcola Report.

The following is a summary of events in that process which began in January of 1977 and ends with this report.

After meeting with John Lowey, Superintendent of Arcola Schools, and consulting with the Arcola School Board, the Citizens' Advisory Committee, and other Arcola citizens, the Program Development Staff from the Office of Continuing Education and Public Service began the process that would be used to gather information about how Arcola citizens felt about their public education system. A survey research approach incorporating phone interviews was used to collect data from a random sample of the adult population living in the Arcola school district. Six Arcola residents, in addition to the University staff, were hired and trained to conduct the telephone interviews.

The information gathered from the telephone interviews indicated that Arcola residents stated six major concerns:

1. discipline in the schools
2. curriculum, particularly career education and the teaching of basic subjects
3. communication among the School Board, administrators, and community
4. the effect of the Teachers' Association on the quality of education
5. how the school system could better serve the community
6. financing, how revenue should be collected as well as spent.

Two public forums organized by the staff from the University of Illinois were held in Arcola to discuss those six concerns, as well as others which might arise at the meetings. At both forums a moderator and three panelists, each representing the School Board, the Citizens' Advisory Committee and the Teachers' Association presented reactions to the data gathered. Audiences at both forums heard comments about the six concerns given by the panelists, as well as members of the audience. Evaluation questionnaires were completed by the community members in attendance following each forum.

The information received from the evaluation on the first forum was used to determine the format and focus for the second forum. The audience reported wanting more opportunity to ask questions from the floor. The format was changed to accommodate this request. The format also included five questions which were put together from audience suggestions of questions which

should be readdressed or introduced at the second forum. These questions were:

1. What can be done about student and community apathy?
2. How can the curriculum be improved?
3. What have been the results of budget cuts in the school system?
4. Is there a discipline problem in Arcola?
5. In what specific ways could the school system better serve the community?

In the evaluation of the second forum, the audience was asked to suggest the kinds of information that ought to be included in the final report. Four topics that emerged from the suggestions given in the evaluation questionnaire were:

1. the inclusion of more descriptive information on telephone interviewees
2. the possibility of a follow-up study
3. the state of the curriculum with regard to career education and the teaching of basic subjects
4. improvement of communication among the School Board, administrators, teachers, and parents.

This report does provide the descriptive profiles of telephone interviewees on six specific interview questions (Findings). At this time, a follow-up study has not been planned. However, the forums seem to have stimulated interest among community members who might choose to initiate a follow-up study. The University staff would be willing to discuss this possibility with interested Arcola citizens.

The curriculum topic centered around the uncertainty of Arcola residents concerning what subjects were offered as part of the career education program. There also was disagreement on the meaning and content of basic education. Open discussion which is promoted by public forums could serve to clarify these issues by making the information about the curriculum available to the community.

Strong feelings were expressed by Arcola residents about the necessity of establishing better communication between the School Board and the community, the faculty and parents, and the faculty and administration. Forums provide a vehicle for exchanges among these groups. Many respondents suggested continuing the process of holding forums as a way of overcoming the problem of a lack of communication.

It is hoped that this report which discusses the concerns, questions, and topics of interest of Arcola residents will be helpful to the community. The University of Illinois staff is willing to return to Arcola to discuss this report.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this project was to develop a process which would enable the University and community to collaborate in the examination of community attitudes toward public education. The process included the gathering of information about citizens' attitudes concerning education and the presentation of that information to the Arcola community for discussion during two open public meetings.

Development of this process is timely, as it presents a way for educators and local citizens to jointly examine their school system. It was hoped that an opportunity to discuss problems and opinions about the public education system without the pressures of either a pending referendum or school board elections would be beneficial to the community. Referendum and school board elections tend to produce emotional, and often partisan stands which do not allow for an open exchange of ideas in a calm atmosphere.

The community of Arcola has a history of positive working relations with the University of Illinois. Arcola residents have been willing to cooperate with the University of Illinois on a variety of projects. Past positive working relations, a relatively calm atmosphere due to an absence of election or referenda, and the size of the community made Arcola an excellent community from whom to solicit help in the development and implementation of this project.

It should be noted that the University of Illinois came to Arcola with *no* hypothesis or preconceived ideas concerning the community's response toward either the project or its educational system. Neither did the

University of Illinois staff come to Arcola to evaluate Arcola's educational system. Evaluation requires contracts, observations, and other activities unlike the ones in which the staff was involved. This report includes only the process in which the University of Illinois staff and the Arcola residents mutually participated.

PROCEDURES

Population and Sample

The community of Arcola with its approximately 2,600 residents comprised the population. Arcola was chosen for this study because certain of its characteristics make it typical of a rural community in central and southern Illinois. These characteristics are: "its small population; its concern for the quality of public education; and its economic base - farming land."

The sample included 324 resident names that were randomly selected from the most current telephone directory. Out of the 324 names that were randomly selected, only 271 actually completed interviews. Partial interviews were taken from 14 persons who prematurely terminated the interview because of health problems, while 23 persons refused to participate. Calls were made to 16 residences at which no one answered.

Arcola contains a small Mexican-American and Amish population. Many of the Amish and Mexican-Americans do not have telephones. Interviewers were sent to five Amish homes and two Mexican-American homes to gather data.

Instrumentation

The University staff wanted to collect data which included attitudes held by Arcola residents about various aspects of their public education system. After consulting one national and several state surveys on community attitudes toward public education, it was decided that nationally and statewide the most significant concerns were curriculum, discipline, finances, and communication among school administrators and the community. A number of questions examining these topics were incorporated into the questionnaires. The danger of accepting these areas of concern is that other areas could have been overlooked. To overcome this problem, open-ended questions were included which were designed to encourage respondents to comment on other issues. A questionnaire was developed based on the national model, "The Eighth Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools," and in consultation with the Survey Research Laboratory at the University of Illinois.

The instrument was pilot-tested on 20 respondents. Further changes were made to eliminate unclear questions and those not suitable for a telephone survey. Length of time to complete the survey was initially a problem, as calls made by the University personnel were long distance and survey specialists suggested that respondents are less likely to spend over 40 minutes on the telephone being interviewed. Discussion between the project staff and the survey research specialists further eliminated questions which were not essential to this study.

The final questionnaire included four sections:

1. Community attitudes about its public education system.

2. Community attitudes about Arcola.
3. Information on whether respondents were interested in a public forum and, if so, when they would be willing to attend.
4. Demographic information.

Design for Gathering Data

Staff decided that telephone interviewing would be an efficient way to gather data on community attitudes about public education from the respondents in the sample. To conduct the telephone interviews, four staff members from the Survey Research Laboratory at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and six Arcola residents were hired, in addition to four members of the Program Development Staff who also conducted telephone interviews. The Arcola residents who were chosen were not politically active in the community, but were identified by community leaders as competent and interested citizens.

The hiring of Arcola residents raised the question of bias in the findings, as a result of these interviewers personally knowing some of the interviewees. In a small community, residents tend to know one another and have more frequent contact than in a larger community. The University staff was aware of this problem, but felt that by hiring those individuals, interest among Arcola residents would be increased. While no assessment on the level of interest has been done, comparisons of data collected by Arcola residents and other interviewers revealed no significant differences in findings.

All persons conducting telephone interviews participated in three-hour training sessions administered by two survey specialists.

Data Collection

Several steps were taken to inform the community about the project prior to starting the telephone interviews. News articles appeared in the local paper and public service announcements were read by local radio stations informing the Arcola community that the telephone interviews would begin within a week. The pre-survey publicity may have aided the data-gathering process, as 88% of the respondents completed interviews. Telephone interviews ranged from 15 to 40 minutes and lasted an average of 30 minutes. Telephone interviewing began on February 20, 1977, and concluded the first week of March, 1977.

Data Analysis

The staff, in consultation with a psycho-metrician, decided to obtain two kinds of information from the survey: 1) frequency tabulations on all questions; 2) cross-tabulations between demographic variables and clusters of attitude variables. The rationale for obtaining frequency counts was to assess the percentage of respondents who expressed specific attitudinal and demographic information. This information gave a profile of what Arcola residents felt about their public education system and their community. The rationale for obtaining cross-tabulational data was to have available groupings of variables that would provide more in-depth descriptions of community attitudes. The cross-tabulations told "who" said "what."

Cross-tabulations were run on categories of variables. With the exception of the demographic data, all other variables tended to fall into seven categories:

1. quality variables, those questions that referred to the quality of the Arcola education system;

2. problem variables, those questions that referred to problems within the system;
3. reduction of budget variables, those questions that referred to ways of reducing the budget;
4. community service variables, those questions that referred to how the school system could better serve the community;
5. new program variables, those questions which referred to adult education programs;
6. attitudes about the community variables;
7. information variables, those questions that referred to how information about the school system is gotten by the community.

The cross-tabulations yielded numerous tables from which to draw respondent profiles.

Once the cross-tabulations were completed, the seven categories were no longer functional. Much of the information gathered from the seven categories began to coalesce into two major categories: 1) problems that were believed to exist in the public education system; and 2) solutions to some of those problems. The findings which emerged came from that process of gathering frequency counts, computing cross-tabulations on demographic and categorical variables, and finally, identifying the problems and solutions.

FINDINGS

The findings that were presented at both public forums were based upon frequency counts and cross-tabulations calculated on each answer given in the telephone interview. The percentage figures represent only the total number of respondents who answered a particular question.

The first set of findings, "General Findings," provides information on how Arcola residents felt about their school system and community, as was expressed in the interviews. In addition, background information, such as the percentage of respondents having children in the Arcola schools, how people obtain information about public education, and the number of respondents voting in the last referendum are also included in the findings.

General Findings

1. General attitudes about public education and the School Board.
   a) 67% believe the quality of their public education is good or very good.
   b) 59% feel that the School Board effectively represents the community's interests and viewpoints.

2. General attitudes about Arcola.
   a) 95% think Arcola is a good place to live.
   b) 82% think their community leaders are good.
   c) 64% have lived in Arcola longer than 15 years.
   d) 88% are planning to remain in Arcola indefinitely.

3. General information.

   a) 47% of the respondents have children currently enrolled in Arcola schools.

   b) 89% get their information about public education from the newspapers.

   c) 59% voted in the last School Board referendum.

The second set of findings, "Findings Which Seem to Emerge as Issues," also were obtained from frequency and cross-tabulations. Under each issue statement is a set of percentage figures which refer to specific questions from the questionnaire that relate to that issue. Some of the percentage figures seem smaller than others. This tended to occur on open-ended questions which fewer respondents answered, but where a wide range of answers were given. While the range of answers for open-ended questions is listed in the appendix, the staff chose to include in the findings only those responses with the highest frequency counts.

Findings Which Seem to Emerge as Issues

1. Discipline.

   a) 72% agree that discipline is a problem.

   * b) 12% state that the Citizens' Advisory Committee ought to bring the problem of discipline before the School Board.

* Response to an open-ended question.

c) 78% agree that stricter discipline should be enforced in the schools.

d) 45% agree that there is a problem with student dropouts.

2. Curriculum.

a) 58% agree that lack of jobs for recent graduates is a problem.

b) 75% agree that developing a career education program would improve the quality of the schools.

c) 31% agree that the 12th grade should be eliminated.

d) 84% agree that more time should be spent in the teaching of basic skills.

3. Financing.

*a) 10% of the respondents think the Citizens' Advisory Committee ought to bring the problem of finances before the School Board.

b) 49% feel their schools need repairing.

c) 76% agree or strongly agree that refurbishment of Arcola schools might improve their quality.

d) 31% think that using a property tax to fund public education is unfair.

*e) 20% believe education should be funded by taxing income.

*Responses to an open-ended question.

4. School Board.

*a) 16% of the respondents suggest that the Board would be made more effective by increasing its communication with the community.

*b) 14% state that effectiveness would be improved if more community input was incorporated in Board decisions.

*c) 13% suggest that the Board needs members who are more representative of the community.

*d) 7% suggest that those who have more time and interest to devote to Board matters should be selected as its members.

5. Teachers' Association.

*a) 13% believe the Association gives the teachers too much control.

*b) 12% believe the Association increases antagonism among the teachers/Board/administrators.

*c) 11% believe the Association has improved conditions for teachers.

d) Arcola residents are split over whether the Teachers' Association has any effect at all and whether the Association improves or lowers the quality of teachers.

6. How the School System Could Better Serve the Community.

a) 49% do not know.

*b) 9% are satisfied with the way things are.

*Responses to an open-ended question.

c) 85% agree that teachers should be provided opportunities to keep up-to-date.

Profiles

During the forums, a profile of respondents was presented in order to give the audience a sense of who in Arcola had been interviewed. This profile is only a generalization made from frequency counts about those answering the telephone when the interviewer called. It is not a description of every respondent.

Those answering the phone *tended:*

a) to be men

b) to be employed full-time

c) to have spouses employed full- or part-time

d) to have completed high school, along with their spouses

e) to have lived in Arcola under five years or over 15 years

f) to live in town

g) to own a single family dwelling

h) to have children, although less than one-half are currently enrolled in Arcola schools

i) to be between 20 and 49 years of age

j) to have voted in the last school bond referendum

k) to be planning to remain in Arcola indefinitely.

During the forums, several audience members requested information on the profiles of respondents who answered the following five questions:

1. Who said that the 12th grade should be eliminated?
2. Who said student discipline is a problem?
3. Who said there is a need for more basic skills to be taught?
4. Who said fixing up old buildings would improve the quality of Arcola's schools?
5. Who said there needs to be improvement in parent/teacher relations?

Included are only the distinguishing demographic features.

1. Who said the 12th grade should be eliminated?

   This respondent tended:

   a) to have either an elementary or high school education, but may also have graduated college.

   b) to be between 50 to 59 and 70 to 79 years of age

   c) to not have children enrolled in school

   d) to have voted in the last School Board referendum

   e) to be either retired or temporarily out of work.

2. Who said student discipline is a problem?

   This respondent tended:

   a) to be between 20 to 49 years of age, although they were more likely to be between 20 to 29 years of age

b) to be employed full-time or a full-time homemaker

c) to have no children in school.

3. Who said there is a need for more basic skills to be taught?

This respondent tended:

a) to have had completed all educational levels, with the exception of graduate school

b) to be between 20 to 29, 50 to 59 years of age

c) to be employed either full- or part-time

d) to be employed in a full range of occupations with the exception of unskilled craftspersons, housewives, students, and retirees.

4. Who said fixing up old buildings would improve the quality of Arcola's Schools?

This respondent tended:

a) to be between 20 to 39 years of age

b) to be more likely to live in town

c) to have no children enrolled in school

d) to be more likely to have voted in the last referendum

e) to be employed full- or part-time, be temporarily out of work, or retired

f) to have completed high school, college, graduate, or technical schools.

5. Who said there needs to be improvement in parent/teacher relations?

This respondent tended:

a) to have completed high school, college, graduate, or technical school

b) to be employed full- or part-time, retired, or not usually employed

c) to be less likely to have children in school

d) to be between 20 to 29 and 60 to 69 years of age

e) to be more likely to live in town.

The preceding questions did produce several distinguishing features. Those who reported a need for better parent/teacher relations and also reported that more basic skills should be taught fell between the age range of 20 to 29 and 50 to 69. Those who thought that the 12th grade should be eliminated were 50 to 59 and 70 to 79 years of age. Those believing that discipline is a problem were largely 20 to 49 years of age and did *not* have children currently enrolled in the Arcola schools. That same group of people who did not have children currently enrolled in Arcola schools also agreed that there is a need for better parent/teacher relations, 12th grade should be eliminated, and fixing the school buildings would improve the quality of the schools.

The findings themselves seemed to mirror those same feelings generated in national and state polls assessing community attitudes concerning public education. Discipline repeatedly was listed as one of the major problems in every poll with curriculum and finances running closely behind. Arcola residents seem to be articulating the same concerns that exist nation-wide.

PLANNING THE FORUMS

Once the data was gathered and analyzed according to frequency and cross-tabulations, the findings were presented to an Advisory Committee from the faculty of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Included in the Advisory Committee were: Alan Peshkin, Education Policy Studies; Gordon Hoke, Center for Instructional Research and Curriculum Evaluation; Edward Lackner, Survey Research Laboratory; and Mary Ann Diller, Regional Program Director. The Committee advised the Program Development Staff to allow Arcola residents to make their own interpretations of the data, as only they could determine what was useful, meaningful, or truly representative of their community.

During the meeting with the Advisory Committee, a discussion was held on how best to present the findings. It was decided that a panel of three Arcola residents representing the School Board, Teachers' Association, and the Citizens' Advisory Committee should be invited to participate in the forums by reacting to the findings and to questions asked by the audience. Subsequent to this meeting, representatives from the Citizens' Advisory Commitee, the School Board, and the Teachers' Association were invited to join the panel. A moderator from the community also was selected.

The Municipal Hall in Arcola was chosen as the place to hold both forums because of its size, accessibility, and neutrality. The specific dates, April 20 and May 4, were chosen because both dates fell on Wednesday and respondents reported on the questionnaires that Wednesday evening would be the best time to hold forums.

Letters were written, and Program Development Staff visited the School Board, Teachers' Association, and Citizens' Advisory Committee to inform and invite each group to the forums. Articles were submitted to the Journal Register, the Arcola weekly paper, and public service announcements were sent to radio stations in the Arcola area to inform the community of and urge their attendance at the first forum.

Project findings were summarized and sent to the panel members along with the format of that evening's forum. The Program Development Staff prepared an evaluation questionnaire which was designed to gather information concerning audience attitudes about the forums, topics for discussion at the second forum, and how the second forum could be improved.

Forum One

The audience for the first forum included 38 people, most of whom were either teachers or Citizens' Advisory Committee members. Four Arcola residents acted as panelists and moderator: Moderator - Marilyn Hall; Panelists - Randy Rothrock (Teachers' Association), Don Munson (School Board), Emerson Moore (Citizens' Advisory Committee). The audience was provided with a statistical summary of the important findings. The following format was used:

1. Welcome by Moderator
2. Overview of Project
3. Summary of Findings
4. Panelist Reaction to Findings (10 minutes per panelist)

5. Break for Refreshments (10 minutes)
6. Audience Written Questions Read by Moderator and Addressed to Panel
7. Other Questions Accepted from Floor
8. Summary of Evening's Proceedings
9. Thanks to People Who Came, by Moderator
10. Request Audience to Fill Out Evaluations and Announce Date of Next Forum

Most written questions asked of the panel specifically addressed the six major concerns: discipline, curriculum, financing, School Board, Teachers' Association, and how the school system could better serve the community. In addition, many audience participants requested the return of adult education classes.

Evaluation

At the end of the first forum, the audience was asked to complete an evaluation questionnaire. The data gathered from the evaluation questionnaire were summarized as follows:

1. What action might be taken as a result of this forum?
   a) hold seminars to motivate high school students
   b) improve communications at all levels
   c) School Board should review curriculum
   d) School Board should publish its agenda before the meetings
   e) discussions should be held on what people believe is good discipline

f) find out how parents think that parent/teacher relations could be improved

g) get more teachers and citizens to attend School Board meetings

h) school administrators should write articles for the local paper, aside from John File's coverage

i) community should be able to submit issues for the School Board meeting agenda

j) school system should initiate adult education classes

k) hold more town meetings for teachers and parents

l) hold more discussion sessions between Board and teachers to iron out difficulties

m) School Board should hold more public meetings.

2. What issues should be emphasized more at the next forum?

a) student and community apathy

b) improvement of the curriculum

c) results of budget cuts and what new cuts are coming

d) discipline

e) how can the school system better serve the community

f) what citizens are willing to participate in assisting schools with their problems

g) how to teach basic skills in context of overall curriculum

h) hiring of local people when possible

i) communication among School Board/teachers/Citizens' Advisory Committee

j) improvement of parent/teacher relationships

k) clarification of School Board stand on teacher residency

l) how can the community be educated about school functions.

3. Issues not raised, but that should be discussed at next forum.

a) does Arcola need a PTA

b) does Arcola need a residency requirement for teachers

c) what are the short- and long-term goals for the Arcola schools

d) what are the budget cut priorities

e) how can better input to School Board be achieved

f) how can community apathy be changed

g) improvement of custodial care

h) negative attitudes of some Board members who don't give reasons for "no" votes

i) evaluation of career education programs as they now exist

j) discussion of the cooperative education program

k) mandated programs which take time away from teaching of basic skills.

PLANNING THE SECOND FORUM

Information gathered from the evaluation questionnaire led to the emergence of five questions to be discussed at the second forum. These questions were thought to include many of the issues raised by Arcola residents in the evaluation questionnaire. The five questions were as follows:

1. What can be done about student and community apathy?
2. How can the curriculum be improved?
3. What have been the results of budget cuts in the school system?
4. Is there a discipline problem in Arcola?
5. In what specific way could the school system better serve the community?

The format for the presentation of these questions was changed in response to the information gathered from the first evaluation. The audience felt, as did the project staff, that more questions could have been raised, and better interaction could have taken place if audience members would have been allowed to raise questions from the floor without submitting them in writing. For the second forum, the panelists would be given the five questions before the forum and asked to comment briefly. After each question, the moderator would invite the audience comments and questions.

As was noted earlier, the audience for the first forum contained largely teachers and Citizens' Advisory Committee members. An effort was made to include a wider cross-section of the Arcola community by placing posters advertising the second forum in locations throughout Arcola. Included in the Arcola High School bulletin was an invitation for high school students and their parents to attend the second forum. Articles and public service announcements were submitted to the newspaper and radio stations.

Forum Two

The second forum was held two weeks after the first forum. The audience included 37 members, but this time they represented a much broader occupational range than did the audience attending the first forum. The structure of the panel remained the same as in the first forum, while the participants were new. Dee Lindenmeyer acted as moderator; Byron Bradford represented the Teacher's Association; Linda Rollings represented the Citizens' Advisory Committee; Raymond Cook represented the School Board. Like the first panel, each panel member received the format with the five questions to which they were to respond.

Unlike the first forum where the audience submitted written questions to the moderator, the second forum encouraged audience questions and comments following each panelist's comments. This format created an immediate interchange of ideas between panelists and audience.

The following format was used:

1. Welcome by Moderator
2. Overview
3. Summary of Findings
4. Moderator Asks Panel First Question
5. Panelists Respond Briefly
6. Moderator Asks for Audience Comments and Questions (This process is repeated for all 5 questions.)
7. Refreshment Break
8. Return to 5 Questions
9. Summary of Evening's Forum
10. Moderator Thanks Audience for Coming and Asks Them to Complete Evaluation Questionnaires

Evaluation

The following is a summary of the information that was gathered from the evaluation questionnaires during the second forum.*

1. A summary description of those attending the second forum.
   a) 16 respondents attended both forums, while 20 new persons came to the second forum
   b) 26 respondents had children currently enrolled, while 11 did not
   c) in attendance were 3 Citizens' Advisory Committee members, 5 School Board members, 5 Teachers' Association members
   d) in attendance were 11 homemakers, 7 farmers, 6 teachers, 1 principal 2 secretaries, 1 dentist, and others in a range of occupations.
2. Suggestions for improving the second forum included:
   a) include a student on the panel
   b) include an elementary and high school teacher on the panel
   c) increase the size of the audience
   e) include persons of more "intense" viewpoints
   f) define and stick to pertinent questions
   g) include more specific information from those who know about Arcola schools
   h) time limit each question
   i) hold these meetings (forums) quarterly

* This information was not requested from respondents on the evaluation questionnaire given at the first forum.

j) include more facts and figures

k) emphasize what the school system is working toward, instead of just defending what is already done

l) print a summary of panelists' and audience's remarks and questions

m) increase parent attendance

3. Suggestions for the kinds of information that would be useful in the final report included:

a) establishing better communication between school and community

b) have University of Illinois experts give direction on solutions

c) include more information on the problems between the teacher and administrators and what is being done to solve them

d) summarize ideas which came out of the forums for use by the Citizens' Advisory Committee, School Board, and teachers

e) use this as a kick-off for future forums run by the School Board or the Citizens' Advisory Committee

f) give follow-up data one year later to see if community has changed or has followed suggestions arising in forums

g) include more information on required curriculum and the history of recent graduates

h) provide information on what the basic curriculum will include in both the high school and elementary school if the referendum is lost

i) how is the administration ranked by the community

j) how can an exchange of ideas be continued

k) how do the University of Illinois people feel about Arcola's education system

l) what are the long-range goals of education in Arcola

m) include a follow-up study that shows amount of community awareness created by the data and the forums

n) include respondents profiles for the 6 major problem areas

o) address community apathy

p) include what has been cut and what will be cut if referendum fails

q) if 72% of the Arcola residents believe there is a discipline problem, why didn't the panel agree.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following is a summary of those topics Arcola residents indicated they would like addressed in the final report. The summary includes suggestions related to those topics: information on telephone interviewees; follow-up studies; curriculum; and communication.

Before addressing these four topics, the staff would like to respond to a question that many Arcola citizens raised, "What does the University of Illinois staff really think of our educational system?" The role of outsiders in a community has often been to assess a situation and evaluate it. It was

not the project's intent to evaluate the Arcola school system, but to ask the citizens to collaborate in developing a process for the gathering and disseminating of information useful to the community. The staff did not participate in the kinds of activities that would have been necessary for an evaluation such as observing classrooms, interviewing students and teachers. The University staff came to cooperate in the development of a process. This report is about that process.

Information on Telephone Interviewees

During the first forum, several people requested a description of respondents from the telephone survey who said that:

1. the 12th grade should be eliminated
2. discipline is a problem in the schools
3. more basic skills should be taught
4. fixing up school building would improve Arcola's schools
5. improvement is needed in parent/teacher relations.

For each question, the staff gathered the cross-tabulations necessary to present a descriptive profile. One important feature that was found was, with the exception of the basic skills statement, the other statements tended to be made by respondents who did *not* have children currently enrolled in Arcola's public schools. Those stating that the 12th grade should be eliminated were 50 - 59 and 70 - 79 years of age. The ages explain why in this particular question respondents tended not to have children currently enrolled in the Arcola schools. However, it may be speculated that among these age groupings are grandparents and great grandparents who may be receiving various types of

information from grandchildren. Another possibility is that members of these age groups never completed high school and, consequently, managed to survive without a 12th grade experience. In any case, the School Board may want to make clear to the community the need and purpose of the 12th grade experience.

The question of discipline as a problem is perplexing. National and state polls on attitudes concerning public school education all report the overwhelming number of respondents who state that discipline is a problem. In many schools this is so. In Arcola, there was disagreement over whether it really is a problem, and if so, to what extent. Discipline is seen as a problem by those without children in school. High school students may have one perspective on discipline differing from either parents or teachers, all with their own opinions on the discipline question. Holding open discussion between high school students, parents, and teachers may bring to light the issues surrounding the question of discipline.

Those respondents who stated the need for teaching more basic skills were between 20 to 29 and 50 to 59 years of age. Again, there appears to be a gap between those who may have young children in school and those well beyond that stage. The fact that some people believe that there is a need to have more basic skills taught may require the school administrators and teachers to examine student achievement records to determine if Arcola students are, in fact, being prepared adequately for adult living. If this is found to be so, the community ought to be told about it.

Those respondents who stated that fixing old buildings would improve the quality of Arcola's schools tended to be 20 to 39 years of age, without

children, and living in town. Very possibly, these respondents were expressing annoyance over what they remember to be the physical conditions of the schools when they attended. The School Board may want to consider if the conditions of the buildings do interfere with learning. If enough citizens see this as a problem, perhaps they may want to contribute some time to helping to make repairs. In any case, School Board and teachers may want to assess the physical condition of the schools and its effect on learning.

More difficult to explain is the age factor in the question of the need for better parent/teacher relations. Those respondents stating that there is a need for better parent/teacher relations tend to be between 20 to 29 and 60 to 69 years of age. The respondents in the 20 to 29 age group are more likely to have elementary school-age children, if they have children. Those in the 60 to 69 age group may have children who are teachers and/or parents. It is difficult to say why these particular groups saw parent/teacher relations as a problem. The reasons are complex and may require the School Board, faculty and parents to explore whether there is, in fact, a problem between parents and teachers.

The preceding represents the perceptions of the project staff. Arcola residents may interpret these findings differently. The staff would encourage the continuation of open discussions on all five questions, not only to better understand why these issues were stated, but whether they are true, to what extent they apply to Arcola's school system, and what might be done to improve those situations the questions may have illuminated.

Follow-Up Studies

Several Arcola residents were interested in knowing the impact of the public forums upon community thinking. Those residents suggested that a follow-up study be done one year later to ascertain if any changes had taken place in Arcola as a result of the Arcola project. Even though at this time there is no plan for such a study, some Arcola residents have suggested actions to bring about change. Some of these suggestions for action included:

1. holding discussions between the School Board and teachers or parents and teachers, in order to air grievances and investigate solutions
2. informing the community
3. receiving citizen input into School Board decisions by publishing the agenda in advance of School Board meetings
4. continuing the dialogue among the School Board, Teachers' Association, Citizens' Advisory Committee, and other interested community members.

While a follow-up study to assess change is not planned at this time, action still can be initiated by interested Arcola residents.

Curriculum

Issues concerning the curriculum were raised at both public forums. These issues centered around the desire, as expressed by Arcola residents,

to have more teaching of basic subjects in the curriculum, to know what are the mandated subjects (those which by State Mandate must be taught), and to understand what is included in the career education program in the high school. A common thread running between both forums and having implications for the issue of curriculum is a lack of understanding on the part of Arcola residents about the dimensions of any one of these curriculum topics. The School Board and teachers may wish to inform the community on what the curriculum includes as the community has demonstrated an interest in knowing about what is being taught and what must be taught.

A public forum could be held by the School Board and faculty to discuss with the community what subjects now make up the curriculum and how much local control can be exercised in the decisions about what ought to be included. It would seem that both community and school personnel would benefit from an exchange of information on this topic.

Communication

Almost half of the suggestions made by forum audiences on the kinds of information which should be present in the Arcola project report centered around the necessity for open and effective communication. Strong feelings were expressed at both forums about the necessity for establishing better communications between the school and the community. Open discussion was seen as a way to approach problems. Dialogue between teachers and administrators and between teachers and parents was thought to lead to the expression of grievances, a first step in addressing a problem. Some Arcola residents

stated that the forums should continue and be sponsored by either the Citizens' Advisory Committee or the School Board.

Public forums may be useful vehicles for exploring some of the questions Arcola residents raised in the evaluation questionnaires. Questions that lend themselves to public discussion are:

1. What are the long-term goals of Arcola's educational system?
2. What has been cut from the school budget and what will be cut in future budget crunches?
3. Is discipline really a problem in Arcola?

As long as those persons who can readily address the questions are invited to participate, a forum can do much to clarify issues and provide information. In addition, a forum allows the community to be heard. Views can be expressed and issues debated. Community opinion on goals and priorities can become part of the decision-making process for the community.

Some community members will want to defer the decision-making process to the School Board or others. This is but one alternative. Another is to take a more active approach through dialogue which clarifies issues and examines solutions. An example of dialogue which exposed a problem was that held at the first public forum. Members of the audience confronted a School Board member with not being sensitive to community need for information about School Board decisions. Before the forum ended, that School Board member acknowledged the problem and the necessity to explore solutions.

Forums can be effective vehicles for the definition and examination of issues and the exploration of questions, such as "where do we go from here?" and "What are our next steps?" During both forums, Arcola residents began to

explore "next steps" in the area of communication as they discussed questions such as: how can communication between parents and teachers be improved; how can citizens become more informed about their school's curricula; and how might the community have more input into the School Board's decision-making process. Continued open discussion which fosters an exchange of ideas may well lead to the discovery of "next steps" for a number of the problems raised by Arcola residents during the forums.

It is the hope of the University of Illinois staff that the citizens of Arcola will continue to explore problems of concern and examine new directions for their educational system. The real experts about Arcola are those living and working in that community. They are the people for whom communication among its groups is vital.

Again, the University of Illinois staff extends its thanks to the Arcola community for its cooperation.